

VZCZCXRO4303  
RR RUEHDBU RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHMO #5454/01 1431229  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 231229Z MAY 06  
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6303  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHDX/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 005454

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: HELSINKI COMMISSION STAFFDEL MEETS WITH MFA NGO  
DEPARTMENT

REF: A. MOSCOW 2502

[1](#)B. MOSCOW 5372

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: In a May 16 meeting with Staffdel Finerty, Valeriy Kuzmin, who heads the MFA department responsible for interaction with Russia's regions, the Parliament, and civil society groups, said that his department also assists domestic NGOs in making contact with international counterparts. The department is developing a pool of NGOs interested in engaging in dialogue with the GOR, particularly on G8 issues. It also did initial research for the NGO law, said Kuzmin, who insisted to the Staffdel that the law met international standards. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) John Finerty and Kyle Parker of the staff of the U.S. Helsinki Commission met May 16 with Valeriy Kuzmin, head of the MFA Department for Relations with Constituent Entities of the Federation, Parliament, and Public and Political Organizations.

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LAYING OUT THE MFA NGO DEPARTMENT'S ROLE  
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[1](#)3. (SBU) According to Kuzmin, the department, which has existed for approximately two years, was created to help NGOs, religious organizations, and political associations interact with the Russian Parliament and regions, as well as with international organizations such as ECOSOC and the Council of Europe. It also supports connections between NGOs and the State Duma's NGO Committee. The department maintains an interactive website on which NGOs can ask questions and receive a response. Kuzmin said Foreign Minister Lavrov has taken an interest in the department and strongly supports its activities. The department hosts regular meetings with interested NGOs -- including "opposition" groups such as Memorial -- to discuss policies that affect them and listen to their concerns. NGO involvement with the department is voluntary, and some invited NGOs -- such as the Moscow Helsinki Group -- choose not to work with it, Kuzmin said.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Kuzmin described his department's role as being like "an air traffic control tower," ensuring that everything runs smoothly and no "collisions" occur. The department, for instance, worked with the Republic of Kalmykia on the issue of granting the Dalai Lama a visa to visit the region. The department is actively involved in the Civil G8 - 2006 initiative ([www.CivilG8.ru](http://www.CivilG8.ru)) (ref A), which has scheduled six meetings during 2006 to discuss issues on the G8 Summit agenda, including an International Forum of NGOs to include over 500 participants from around the world. Ella Pamfilova, Chairman of the Council for Civil Society Institutions and Human Rights under the President of the Russian Federation, has the lead in arranging those activities, and the department is providing logistical support.

14. (SBU) Among the department's future goals was to draw from a pool of NGOs to compete for work on special projects abroad, Kuzmin continued. These projects would include organizing cultural programs for Russian-speakers in CIS countries and for Russian-speakers from CIS countries who live in Russia. He said the department had studied similar programs in Italy, Greece, Japan, Canada, and the U.S. and would like to implement them, but lacked the budget to do so.

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NGO LAW

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15. (SBU) Asked about the controversial NGO law (ref B and previous), Kuzmin emphasized that every government had the right to regulate NGOs in its own way, and the West was applying a double-standard to Russia. He said that the NGO law had been based on rigorous research of international precedents and, as evidence, presented a table the department had developed that compared the NGO laws of France, the U.S., Finland, Israel, and Poland to Russia's. On implementation, he stressed that the principles of transparency, accountability, and responsibility would be followed and that existing NGOs would be able to continue their activities as before. The Federal Registration Service will make all decisions to open, close, or allow an NGO to keep functioning based on its documentation. As long as NGOs do not hide their activities, they should have no problems, Kuzmin said.

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PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE

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16. (SBU) Kuzmin stressed that creation of a vibrant civil society would be a generational, organic process, which could not be forced through artificially in 2-3 years. He added that the breakup of the Soviet Union had been a conscious

MOSCOW 00005454 002 OF 002

choice -- the USSR had not been destroyed by outside forces -- and the mentality of today's "Pepsi generation" was already changing in terms of perspectives on NGOs, business, and culture. The older generation, however, still tended to think in Soviet terms. He said Russian society should strive for a "golden mean," becoming neither too Western nor too nostalgic for the Soviet Union's "glory days."

17. (U) The staffdel did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.  
BURNS